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# Transpersonal Psychology

## Some Irreverent History

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A slightly skewed view of some of the important figures and events in the history of transpersonal psychology, highlighting the contributions of William James, Anthony Sutich, Michael Murphy, Miles Vich, Ram Dass, Stan Grof, Albert Hoffman, and others. Some humor is included.

*(From the introduction to the speaker)...In many ways he is the ultimate transpersonal jester, trickster, who has given himself liberty to have us look at ourselves with levity.*

WHEN YOU have worked for twenty-five years to bring a major psychological revolution onto the planet, it's hardly a tribute to your spiritual development to simply be known as a trickster. That was a personality characteristic I had before this revolution began. I'd thought I'd been asked to present an irrelevant history—an easy task. However, a few days before the meeting, I reread the request and discovered I was to disclose an *irreverent* history—a more challenging and subtle matter. Sadly, for you, I had already prepared substantial serious remarks

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*Note:* Adapted from an informal talk given at the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Convocation of the Association for Transpersonal Psychology held in August, 1993, at the Asilomar Conference Center, Monterey, California, USA. As the subtitle implies, this talk should not be seen as a balanced overview, but as an uneven mixture of obscure anecdotes, barbed personal references to persons present and presenting, a scattershot of opinions not held by most of the general membership of the Association, and a few opinions not held by anyone but the author.

that have nothing to do with our history, but which I'll slide into this speech at opportune moments so my prior work won't be entirely wasted.

Let's begin with a short meditation to give you an opportunity to demonstrate to yourself your own spiritual progress. Please stand.

*(A track from the 1938 Benny Goodman Carnegie Hall Concert in New York City with Harry James, Gene Krupa, Lionel Hampton, Teddy Wilson, and Johnny Hodges was played at full volume.)*

It's not generally known that the transpersonal movement began with Benny Goodman's 1938 concert, but as of tonight it will be recorded as such. What is important, of course, is to ask yourself the questions that arise naturally from this meditation:

- Is everybody happy?
- Is your shadow happy?
- Is your wounded, wounded child happy?
- Your dysfunctional family?
- Your goddess, your warrior, your crone, your king?
- How is your wounded healer?

Please be seated. For just a moment, befriend the person sitting to each side of you. Nothing

out of line. Be aware that caressing will either be appreciated or repulsed. Be sensitive.

*(A pause while the members of the audience introduce themselves to one another.)*

I freely admit I have forgotten some of our history. I want to thank Michael Harner for supplying a new reason for my condition. For years I'd been worried that I had burned my brains out in the sixties having intense spiritual experiences aided by natural substances. It is a relief to know my memory loss comes from too many spirit trips.

When you review the transpersonal emergence, you discover that psychology is just one of the fields we've affected. Our stance and our effects are wider than that. We have been revisioning all of human experience—not just the portion allotted to conventional psychology.

The transpersonal from its onset stood almost simultaneously on three legs—direct experience, education, and media — each one supporting the others. The most important medium was New Dimensions Radio, the love child of Michael and Justine Toms. Almost all of you have heard some of their programs; many of you have been their guests on the air. Their work extended our impact from our heartland, the Bay Area—that Bucky Fuller called “the cockpit of spaceship earth”—taking our ideas worldwide so that they could become “world-important,” “world-available,” and “world-meaningful.”

Even before New Dimensions, audio tapes of Esalen seminars were recorded, edited, and packaged by Paul Herbert. Paul was a court reporter who came down to Esalen in the very early days. After a while he noted that he was spending all his income to stay at Esalen. So he decided to shorten the drive, change careers, and live at Esalen. In order to earn a living, he began recording the sessions of people Mike Murphy invited down to the fledgling institute. Between Paul's library and that of New Dimensions, we have an astounding collection of our developmental history and it has been distributed internationally.

A second leg was institutional. One of the messages the divine wind whispered as it blew through the Bay Area was that it was possible to offer a real education. The California Institute for Integral Studies and its earlier incarnations, and

the Institute for Transpersonal Psychology, which also went through a number of incarnations, are the model institutions. There are others, but not as radical in their class offerings nor as inclusive in their mission statements. CIIS and ITP both took seriously the challenge that it was possible to educate not only from the eyebrows up. Going beyond the aspirations of graduate schools like Berkeley, Stanford, and Yale, these institutions strove to educate the whole person: mind, body, intellect, and soul. The scurrilous rumor that these institutions primarily educated from the eyebrows down is...mostly untrue.

ITP, for example, created acceptable models so that a bridge now exists from the kind of deep internal work we've all done back to the mainstream culture. While I've been accused of being ITP's co-founder, Bob Frager and I know the truth. He did it. I helped him from the beginning, but the risks, the difficulties, the real pain, the financial fears, and the accolades, are all his. To Bob belongs the credit for having created not only that institution but an institution within it. ITP was the first to develop an experiential distance-learning global program. More recently, ITP has created an on-line linked community. In it, a working group shares assignments and supports one another, creating an intense rapport that has as much impact as when a group is physically bundled together inside a traditional campus.

Through these twenty-five years, there has been an expansion and acceptance of the educational outreach achieved by the *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*. Institutions, associations, and journals have come and gone, while Miles Vich and his staff have quietly, diligently, and with dignity managed to keep things flowing. The movement is still growing. *ReVision* has been with us for a few years, as has *Common Boundary* and the *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*. Several other journals are starting up. These outlets have nurtured our need to create theories, to speculate, and to conduct further research.

One theory of history is that a few people make the difference. Margaret Mead said it most beautifully: “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world.” We intend to change the world, and as

most people don't, we probably will. If we can accept the theory of history that heroes make a difference, then by mentioning some of our heroes we can get a clearer idea of the history of the transpersonal movement.

Probably the earliest transpersonal hero is William James, who laid out the full spectrum of what we now call transpersonal psychology. For a few bright years, psychology with James included altered states, yoga, meditation, nitrous oxide psychosis, creativity, and religious revelation. All that James could get his hands on. However, as Leary and Alpert would learn later on, Cambridge has always been a tricky town to work in, especially if one wants to keep mind and spirit in the same academic box. It spawns, but does not favor, its radicals.

Psychology, birthed by James, unfortunately grew up in the university. As a young and immature discipline, it saw that all the new buildings, grants and cultural prestige were going to the disciplines known as "hard science." It made a disastrous turn, trying to be like those rich kids. We have not yet recovered from that hard turn to the right, away from James' unbounded curiosity into the narrow corridors of material science. When I taught William James, students were astounded to find out that his ideas were at the core of everything else they had been learning.

William James is well known; he is a hero we share with mainstream psychology, but Tony Sutich is uniquely our own. His vision created a space for us and his amazing charm and cheerfulness sucked a lot of us into doing the work to make his vision become a reality. Tony created two of the four major schools of psychology that exist in the world—while lying in a slant bed with muscles that worked only half his face and one hand, enough so he could pull a cord to turn his phone on and off. He had been disabled by arthritis from age 18, finishing his education and getting his license to practice clinical psychology at a time when such a feat was close to impossible. What was wonderful about Tony was that he made his living doing therapy. I loved to send him clients. I'd send over people who were well-to-do, well-educated, with families and interesting jobs. They would see Tony because they were not happy enough, not fulfilled, or their marriage wasn't going real well, etc. Tony would look at them and

smile. It soon became clear to the client that Tony was in a wonderful mood and he was enjoying a rich, full, and interesting life. They would get ashamed of themselves for seeing their lives as difficult and would get better—perhaps just to stop seeing him.

Earlier I mentioned the *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, but let us not forget that the journal emerged full-blown from the glowing embers of the *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* that Tony also founded. As some of you are members of the Association for Humanistic Psychology, I will share a secret with you. The Association for Humanistic Psychology and the Association for Transpersonal Psychology were founded, initially, for the sole purpose of charging people more than they would pay for the journal alone. Tony was advised that if you start a journal, it's very expensive. But if you start an association at the same time, people will join it, and that way you can, by charging people for membership plus a journal, afford to put out a journal. For the first few years, that's the way it worked. We were a little organization of naive, but good souls. When I became the second president of the Transpersonal Association, I suggested that we do something to serve the members. One service we offered in those early days was to inform the members that if there was something a member wished to give to every member, we would do the mailing. No advertising, just gifts. I recall a wonderful Tibetan sent us two hundred copies of the first issue of his group's journal. Not with subscription blanks inside, just copies to give away.

Things have, hopefully, not changed too much. We are larger, but there is good reason to assume that we can sustain our growth in the next twenty-five years and continue to give each other gifts. Mike Harner told us that the more generous you are, the more the spirits root for you.

Ram Dass is another secret hero of the Transpersonal Association and of the *Journal*. He was the secret angel who supported us during those lean years when we really needed more than the *Journal* and the Association to keep us from vanishing before we were self-sufficient. In the early years of the *Journal* we published a series of articles edited from talks he'd given to psychologists about the far-out matters we were discovering. Dick Alpert, as he was still called

then, spoke Harvard and psychology with such a good accent that he made it sound as if we knew what we were doing. The articles were put into a book published by Doubleday titled *The Only Dance There Is*. When we asked Ram Dass what we should do with the royalties, he told us, "You asked for the tapes, Miles did all the editing, you published the articles. All I did was give the talks, therefore the royalties should be yours."

Those royalties supported the Association for about six years. The *Journal* still gets royalties. How well it did surprised us all, Ram Dass included. After about six years, he wrote us and asked if we would release half the royalties for another one of his projects. Of course we said, "Of course."

While some of us were creating educational institutions, Esalen was creating itself. ITP, CIIS and the like were intended to resemble mainstream institutions. Better, but like them, offering weekly classes, giving degrees, and the like. Mike Murphy and Dick Price, on the other hand, actually created, out of clear space and a good location, a totally new kind of institution for the Western world. It was and still is a dazzling idea. The genesis of Esalen created an entirely different way of education. That vision, clear to Michael from the onset, is still being unfolded. Michael is not yet satisfied. Esalen is not fully cooked. But its impact, to date, has been enormous. Growth centers are now everywhere. Churches have them. They can even be found in houses beside boring old universities—personal growth opportunities, like weeds pushing through concrete—due in part to the vitality and versatility of the model that Michael and Dick fostered.

One question I'm often asked is why Esalen was so sexually open. The amount of sexual openness at Esalen was more than the culture had imagined possible in its wildest fantasies. Stag movies produced during the early Esalen years are a pale version of sexual reality compared to the real thing.

One theory is that the Esalen Indians, who used the hot mineral springs and imbued the very rocks with the spirits of their ancestors, set a vibration going that people tuned into when they established Esalen. They are known, in the formal literature as "one hot tribe," but they left few

artifacts. They were an ecologically sensitive tribe and left the whole area cleaner than when they arrived several thousand years earlier. This theory is popular among people who project virtues to which they still aspire onto Indian tribes that they have never met.

But as Michael Harner says, it takes more than feathers and drums. Feathers and drums and hot baths may indeed be the secret ingredients, and research shows you can do without the feathers and drums. In the early days, I used to take people to the baths who had come for the first time. I'd say, "Let's clean up before dinner. Want a bath?" I'd walk them down and undress in front of them as if everyone always did. They would follow my lead, freaking out but pretending they were cool. Then we'd make our way down the little cement stairs sniffing the faint rotten-eggs smell from the water. We'd emerge onto the platform over the cliff. They would see that they were surrounded by lots of naked people. They would make this incredible effort to stay cool and not to look. Then they'd sit in hot water for an hour, periodically cooling and drying out on a massage table, looking up into the stars, the surf pounding below, and nude people moving back and forth on every side. More nude people than they'd ever seen in a lifetime or thought they would ever see before The Last Judgment. When they went back up the hill, they would spend the evening in a dazed trance, not sure that they would ever return to normal—or wish to.

Was it a wonderful or terrible thing? A weekend at Esalen disrupted marriages and created marriages; it changed career paths, and shattered dysfunctional relationships of all sorts. Another theory is that the hot baths generated the sexuality. But the contrary was also true. People learned, some to their dismay, that being submerged in hot water for a couple of hours diminished sexual capacity. Also, most people's bodies in the buff were nothing like what they had been ogling in *Playboy* or *Body Builder*. A third theory suggests that since Esalen was run by sixteen bachelors willing every weekend to behave like Club Med employees, a positive view of unabashed sexuality was inevitable. Look into your own past and come to your own conclusions.

Esalen, with or without baths, has spawned a hundred institutions, from Finland to Tasmania,

from Estonia to Brazil. Esalen is also responsible for the overthrow of the communist government in Russia. A lot of people actually don't know that, and with little credibility, assign the cause to other forces. Tonight we set the record straight.

Boris Yeltsin came to the United States as Esalen's guest. He was moved and impressed with many aspects of American life but what cracked him open was a supermarket in Texas. He understood that Texas was between the great centers of civilization of the United States. For him it was like visiting the nowhere that stretches across most of the former USSR. He was stunned that this supermarket, one of those acres of everything-you've-ever-seen-advertised places, was there in the middle of nowhere. He reeled with the impact of his observation that capitalism led to this. As you may or may not know, Russia is not awash with supermarkets.

That event helped him move from being a Gorbachev backup and a moderate reformer to being far more radical. Thus in a very real sense, Michael Murphy and Esalen changed the world. If we had more of those great globes of crystal we've been giving away tonight, Michael should certainly get a couple.

Another ardent friend of the transpersonal has been a publisher. Many of us who are in the book world know that publishers who understand what we are trying to do are still rare. Jeremy Tarcher started by publishing less than Pulitzer Prize books about Hollywood related topics. Due to circumstances beyond his control, however, he became more enlightened and has for many, many years been another one of our heroes. Look at Tarcher titles, and you'll see the books that have moved the field ahead.

To the extent that we are a multicellular organism, Jeremy and, by now, many other publishers, including Shambhala and Celestial Arts, have come into the field. But Jeremy is the individual who carried a number of us out into the world so that we didn't remain a California cult. I've learned in my travels that being from California lowers your credibility almost instantly everywhere else. However, if you are published, and especially if you've been published by Tarcher, people think you did something right.

Our most extravagant outreach team was, of course, Tim Leary, Dick Alpert, and Ralph

Metzner, the Tinkers to Evers to Chance of the transpersonal. They blew their careers early on in pursuit of truth and blew away most of our careers a little later on. What are the results of their quarter-century of personal work? Ralph has returned to defending plants, Tim develops software, and Dick does one-liners about his own neurosis to sold-out audiences. On the other hand, and this is the worst news I can give you, Harvard has returned to normal.

We've just heard stories about Stan Grof tonight. His heroism is well known. I suggest that if the current rave generation eventually comes to power, there will be a large parade down 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue and the lead car will have Stan Grof in it—a national and international hero who opened up heads we thought would remain forever closed. Stan is another hero who has changed the history of a country. I listened once to President Havel of the Czech Republic speak of him as “one psychiatrist” who deeply influenced his ideas about human dignity and personal growth.

Not to be overlooked in this heroes' gallery is Albert Hoffman, born a chemist, and later to become a mystic. His contributions to the cultural revolution began on the day he inadvertently absorbed newly synthesized LSD through a cut on his finger and before its effects were felt was bicycling home. What he discovered was to become one of the gateways into the center of the self. LSD broke a system wide open that badly needed deconstruction. We are the children and grandchildren of his amazing discovery. The notion that God can be made manifest through chemistry was fairly radical then. In fact, it was totally unacceptable at the time. To most people, it still is.

A follow-up to Hoffman's discovery came through the writings of Aldous Huxley. When he first took mescaline, he found that the world could be experienced as endless beauty. He wrote a manuscript about his observations and gave it to his Vedanta teacher to review. When they next met, his teacher said, “A lot of karma, if you publish. A lot of karma.” The book led to another explosion of people interested in following up on his insights using mescaline and other psychedelics.

Scanning our bookshelves is a good way to look back through our history. From Yogananda

through Castaneda, there are trailblazers who put their lives on the line for spirit. But each of us, published or not, has a story of how this work invited us in. Elmer Green, one of the pioneers in biofeedback, tells how he went to work at the Menninger Clinic. He was looking for a job and had a vision of where it would be. He wanted to come to California, but his vision looked exactly like Menninger's. At that time, if you really wanted to settle in California, the chance to go to Kansas was definitely a second prize. One of his teachers materialized before him. Elmer asked, "Do I have to take this job?" The teacher answered, "No, of course not." Elmer asked "Well, what will happen?" The teacher answered, "We'll give the job to someone else."

While those of us who have been offered jobs and taken them have a tendency to think, "I was picked for this because I am so cool," Elmer's story suggests an alternative possibility—that you are just another name on the list. And you will never know how many people turned the job down before it fell to you. It may be as the Gospel says, "many are called," but the reason that few are chosen may be that few even show up for the interview.

In our early history, the number of people who used God's own chemicals to scrub off their 1950s upbringing was large. Some of you may not have known an organization that is one of the great heroes of the chemical revolution. It has never taken credit in public, but tonight I will pierce the veil of secrecy. All hail and honor to the CIA. Notice who near you just clapped; they may be agents who are here to keep tabs on the rest of us.

The CIA, at one point, was the major United States distributor of LSD. And all this time you thought the government was against you! A few entrepreneurs moved into the CIA's territory and eventually shifted the culture. Owsley Stanley was the first and finest, doing what he felt was a necessary community service, once he realized that much of the LSD available on the streets was often impure or not acid at all. He routinely gave away half of what he manufactured, letting the other half move through legal and illegal distribution channels. He felt the free LSD would keep the prices low and it did. He supported the Haight/Ashbury chemically, but also took his profits from the acid to help fund the Oracle, The Dead, and many other groups. His work combined

a model of philanthropy, habitat preservation, and evolutionary sociology.

We've talked a little about Professor William James. Let us not forget the other great professor, Fredrich Spiegelberg, the brilliant teacher of religious studies at Stanford who turned Michael Murphy onto the larger spiritual world. Fredrich Spiegelberg was one of the classic German I-know-everything-that-has-ever-been-created brilliant, gentle, illuminating lecturers on Eastern thought. Michael Murphy was a bright jock from Salinas who went to Stanford. That they met and how they met affected us all. Michael, a clean-shaven Stanford undergraduate, showed up in Spiegelberg's class the first day of the semester. A man appeared and started lecturing. Michael pulled out his notebook and started writing. About ten minutes into the lecture, Michael realized he was in the wrong class. But he stayed. The class changed his life. His changed life changed all of ours.

Was Michael going into the wrong classroom a mistake? Is it possible that sometimes what we call a mistake is when you let an angel push you a little? Our knowledge of what the right paths are for us is almost nonexistent. When we can fess up to our ignorance may be when our angels can help us. Angels as you know are immaterial. It's hard for them to push you. It is cheering to imagine that Michael was guided, helped, even directed to that classroom.

We considered the heroes theory of history. Another theory, by Tolstoy, is described in *War and Peace*. In there, between battles and love stories, he speculates that wars, battles, and empires are not won or lost by the acts of heroes but by the way many little events pile up. Michael Murphy making a mistake about his class schedule is evidence for the Tolstoyan theory. That Michael went on to be a great being is evidence for the hero theory. The synthesis of theories may be that small events open opportunities for people to become heroes.

Michael Murphy eventually studied Eastern thought seriously enough to go to India. He lived in an ashram and meditated seven hours a day. The ashram was so Victorian that if you woke up with an erection, you were instructed to pray until it went away. From there he returned to the United States and set up Esalen. There, if you woke up with an erection, you found someone to prey upon until it went away.



During the day, a lot of people have said to me, “I hope you’re not going to mention me.” A few people asked, “Will you mention me?” I could have outlined this talk merely by noticing who is in the front rows and recalling embarrassing stories about each of them. Thank goodness we are still too young a movement to cast any of us as saints. We still know the truth about each other. It is comforting to know, however, that in a few hundred years, our lives will be recast to make us look far better.

From the beginning, we have fought to upgrade psychology—with some success. Remember the Freudians and the behaviorists and all their people who used to be important? And who still think they are? We’ve been harpooning and lampooning the Freudian dragons of darkness, depression, and despair and the behaviorist dragons of soul-dampening, spirit-damning mechanical worldviews. At the same time, we’ve thrown out a line to raise up “I-Thou’ers” of the humanistic authenticity tradition beyond personality into the world of the spirit. How are we doing? Better than you think.

The lead article in the current issue of the *American Psychologist* (the most mainstream journal in psychology) is by Roger Sperry, a very famous, important, and generally nice fellow. He describes the “revolution” that has swept away the behaviorist and Freudian positions. Sperry says he and his colleagues have restored mental phenomena to the center of psychology and they have taken away the “scientism” of the behaviorists. The denial of mental states is the overriding conceptual paradigm that the revolution has overthrown. Sperry announces to the rest of the psychological community that mind is a valid construct. He adds that the body is a vital causal factor of human psychology. This is Transpersonal 101 to you, but not as obvious to most psychologists. We will certainly not get the credit for our part of the work. However, we can feel good knowing that all the demons that we have been fighting are now totally overthrown—according to Roger Sperry. Other people will take credit and we will go to psychological meetings and still be treated as if we are slightly demented.

One of the healthiest signs of a successful psychological revolution is if it doesn’t take itself too seriously early on. What makes this meeting

so different from many others I’ve attended, is how often we acknowledge the deep realization that all that we have done is play at a wonderful game. And that we are grateful we’ve had the opportunity to play.

A Sufi teacher came to ITP about ten years ago. My students asked him if this were a specially difficult time in human history. He said that he had thought about that a great deal. Then he had noticed that in the spring the flowers flourished, in the summer the crops ripened, in the fall things got brown and dried up, and in the winter it was quite cold. He concluded this was not a worse time than other times but was much like other times. I heard his remarks as optimistic. He went on to say in any case there was a great deal of work to be done within ourselves, in our families, groups, and nations.

What’s our next stage of development? We need to move on from being bold children where we say to one another, “We’re going to have our own little house, our own little radio station, our own little institution, our own little journal...” We’ve done those things pretty well. What is the next task? What does the universe offer that you accept?

We conclude with a practice I learned from Al Huang so you will also feel, in every cell, a little bit of good humor. This is a very sophisticated Chinese practice that goes back well before the time of Christ and helps to explain why certain parts of the world are more cheerful than others. Let’s perform Al Huang’s yoga:

Stand up, put your hands on your hips, lean back a little, tilt your face up, and laugh...  
Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha!  
Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha!  
Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ho! Ho! Ho! Ho! Ha!  
Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha!







Photo by Philippe L. Gross

*Reality is the leading cause of stress amongst those in touch with it.*

—Jane Wagner